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3.

THE PLACE AND WORK

OF

Women in the Church.

NOTE.—To the attentive and prayerful reader of the Bible, it is unnecessary to define the position of women in the Church—the law of the Lord is clear and explicit upon it ; but it is needful to impart instruction to young, ignorant or prejudiced persons.

With this object in view, the subjoined pages are published, in the hope that they may be profitable, to all such, and tend to the glory of God, the Unity and Peace of the Church.

JOHN MUNRO.

A DIALOGUE.

On a quiet winter evening, Mr. Novice found himself comfortably seated in Mr. Elder's Library. After briefly discussing the latest news, the conversation drifted into a semi-theological channel, and Mr. N. was naturally desirous of profiting by the opportunity of learning Mr. E's. views upon topics which had been discussed in the community. They spoke about Revivals of Religion,—the signs of a true Revival—the responsibilities of all church-members and all professing christians. By and by N. asked for light with regard to the right of women to take a leading part in public religious meetings. He had heard and seen such things and wished sincerely to know the mind of the Lord on the point. The conversation then flowed on as follows :

N. May we not suppose that the woman described in the thirty-first chapter of Proverbs is designed as a model of domestic merit and excellence in the Church ?

E. Yes, and a very excellent example in every respect ; she has the seal of the Holy Spirit upon her. "All scripture is given by inspiration of God," and this portion may well excite our admiration.

N. Women form an important part of the Church. But what is to be understood by "Church"?

E. The term "Church" is applied to those who profess to be the people of God—as, "the Church, that is in their house," Rom. 16.5.—An assembly met for worship,—"In the midst of the Church, will I sing praise unto thee," Heb. ii. 12; a congregation, "Come together in the Church," 1 Cor. 11. 18. A society of Christians, Acts xi. 22. "The Church which was in Jerusalem." In these and other texts "Church" refers to a large or small assembly of Christians.

N. But there are many Churches?

E. Yes, in name, and in providential arrangements—such as the seven churches of Asia—Rev. i. 4. Nevertheless there is but one Church. "Christ loved the Church and gave himself for it"—Eph. v., 25.

N. Who are Church Members?

E. "The visible Church....consists of all those throughout the world that possess the true religion, together with their children," see Conf. of Faith, chap. xxv.

N. Do the office-bearers derive their standing and authority from the Church?

E. No, only from Christ,—The alone King and Head of the Church. "One is your Master, even Christ, and all ye are brethren."—Matt. xxiii., 8.

N. By whom are they elected?

E. By the congregation "Look ye out among yourselves."—Acts vi., 3,6. The Kirk Session consists of Elders. Acts xiv., 23—"Ordained them elders in every church." The Presbytery ordains to the ministry. "Laying on of the hands of the Presbytery."—1 Tim. 4, 14.

N. Are church rulers, courts, "governments," essential to the peace and prosperity of the church?

E. Yes: obey them that have the rule over you.—Heb. xiii., 17.

N. Have women a standing as public officials in the church?

E. No, we never read of them being elected or set apart to office, among the Patriarchs—in the Jewish or Christian Church—they were not allowed to preach, to govern, or to dispense the sacraments—yet in their individual and social capacity they have been, in all ages, most excellent and useful members of the church.

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N. Did not Zipporah circumcise her son?—Ex. iv., 24.

E. Yes: as Calvin says, “ Ignorantly dictated by passion”—“ her presumption is inexcusable, while her husband was present.—No more allowable in her than it would be in a woman, in the present day, under the eye of a Bishop to baptise.”

N. Calvin upon this point is no doubt correct. But have not women a right to speak in church, that is, take part in conducting worship in a promiscuous assembly?

E. No.

N. But women are allowed, and even invited and urged to speak in some of our churches in these days.

E. True—but such customs are unscriptural. The law is, “ Thus saith the Lord.” Obedience to the word is particularly insisted upon throughout the Bible. “ Sanctify them through thy truth, thy word is truth.” It might be shown that not one christian woman in ten thousand would desire, much less attempt to speak in church!

N. Perhaps so: but mark the good done by the few ladies who use their eloquence in public. Generally they have large audiences, stir up slothful men, and make the meetings lively.

E. The good is doubtful, the liveliness evanescent. Your argument is repeatedly refuted in our unerring standard, the Bible. Its fallacy is shown in the reply of the prophet to the king of Israel,—“ And Samuel said, hath the Lord as great delight in burnt-offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord?”—“ Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, he hath rejected thee from being king.”—1 Sam. xv., 10, 35.

N. Yes, the Lord is righteous and his word a perfect standard. Saul’s disobedience, though clothed with good intentions, was sinful—and therefore his punishment justly merited. But in the Bible women are shown to have engaged in the service of the Lord: Why then deny them the privilege of speaking in church?

E. You should have known ere now that this is strictly forbidden, see 1 Cor. xiv., 34, 36; 1 Tim. ii., 11, 12.

N. The apostle makes frequent reference to women who aided him in his work, “ Phebe a servant of the Church,”... “ A succourer of many and of myself also,”—and in like manner of Priscilla, Mary, Persis and others.—Rom. xvi., 1.

E. Such help for his personal necessities was indispensable ; Paul did not, like Peter, and other apostles, lead about a sister, a wife, (1 Cor. ix., 5) so that his dependence upon female help becomes very obvious. Moreover, Paul was frequently a prisoner in chains. In these circumstances he must have stood in great need of aid from such friends. No marvel, that, he expressed himself so affectionately to his benefactors. Again, Paul refers to the women who labored with him in the gospel (Phil. iv., 3.) The help afforded by pious women in dealing with converts of their own sex was quite as necessary, as their personal service,—perhaps more so.

Dr. Hodge, explaining 1 Cor. xiv., 33, 34, says that the last clause of v. 33 should be connected with v. 34, and then the sense is fully given thus : As is the case in all Churches of the Saints, let your women keep silence in the public assemblies (churches.) The fact that in no Christian Church was public speaking permitted to women, was itself a strong proof that it was unchristian, i.e., contrary to the spirit of Christianity. Paul, however, adds to the prohibition the weight of apostolic authority, and not that only but also the authority of reason and of Scripture. *It is not permitted to them to speak.* The speaking intended is public speaking, and especially in the church."

On v. 35 Dr. Hodge says : " The desire for knowledge in women is not to be repressed, and the facilities for its acquisition are not to be denied them. The refinement and delicacy of their sex however should be carefully preserved. They may learn all they wish to know without appearing before the public. For it is a shame for women to speak in the church. The word translated "shame" properly means "ugly," deformed. It is spoken of anything which excites disgust. As the peculiar power and usefulness of women depend upon their being the objects of admiration and affection, anything which tends to excite the opposite sentiments should for that reason be avoided."

N. I now feel the force of the exposition of these passages : want of reflection left me in ignorance of their import. The Missionary's wife, in our day, is, generally, necessary to the success of Mission work.

E. Peter in his epistles makes no allusion to female help. No, he had his wife, but he urges women to be in subjection to

their husbands, even as Sarah obeyed Abraham.—1 Pet. ii., 1, 7. John is also silent, respecting the labours of women in the Church,—only, he addresses one of his epistles to a Lady regarding the faithful superintendence of her household. Nor does James refer to women, except, in commanding the faith of Rahab, and her good works, which were done privately.

N. In the gospel narratives women are honoured with a place among the disciples of Christ,—Mary, Martha, Joanna, Susanna and others. To Mary Magdalene, He said, “go to my brethren and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father ; and to my God, and your God.”

E. These women were highly favoured, they were among the first to behold the risen Saviour: Mary Magdalene received the command, “Go to my brethren.”—It was a special message, given privately, under circumstances which can never again occur. These women were not sent forth as preachers or exhorters.

N. True, these women were signally honoured ; but there was the woman of Samaria—John iv., 29—did she not speak publicly ?

E. Yes, but not in the Church—she was not yet baptized: It was a personal effort to save souls, most commendable in man or woman. The case was peculiar. The Samaritans expected the Messiah, and now heard the glad tidings from one who had just received them from Himself. The Bible abounds with the benevolent, spiritual and heroic doings of women. Moses' sister helped to save his life, Ex. ii., 4 ; the captive maid was an instrument in healing Naaman—2 Kings v., 3. Deborah, judged Israel and led their armies to victory—Judges iv, v. Huldah exercised her prophetic office in the college, though probably in private—2 Kings xxii., 16, Hannah, sang praises individually to God in the tabernacle—1 Sam. ii., 1, 11. Dorcas—Acts ix., 36—was a type of multitudes of excellent women who, in our day, “are full of good works and alms deeds.”

N. It is manifest that women worshipped in public and, in the same manner, used their talents, on special occasions—part of the temple was assigned to them, “The Court of the women.”

E. Undoubtedly : it was probably in this apartment that Anna testified concerning the birth of the Messiah, “to all

them who looked for redemption in Jerusalem." But the blessed virgin and Elizabeth did not raise their voices in songs of praise and thanksgiving publicly, but in the house of Zacharias.—Luke i., 40.

It might be well to mark that when women took a prominent or unusual part in the public affairs of Israel—the Church and nation were invariably, in a low state! Deborah understood this, when, consenting to accompany Barak to the field of battle, she said, " notwithstanding the journey that thou takest shall not be for thine honour."—Judg. iv., 9.—No: It is not for the honour of man,—or the well-being of the Church, when women are under the sad necessity, to occupy the place which should be bravely and faithfully held by men.

N. I, also, have frequently thought, with great pleasure, upon these beautiful examples of female excellence—and always marked with sorrow the sad and prostrate condition of Israel at such times. But Peter gives the words of Joel ii., 25, "I will pour out of my spirit upon all flesh and your sons and daughters shall prophesy."—Acts ii., 17.

E. The word, "prophesy," is used in a variety of ways "to foretell," Matt. xiii., 14; to divine, Matt. xxvi., 68—to teach, 1 Cor. xiv., 3. "He that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort." Also for the service of praise.—1 Chron. xxv., 1, 7... "Six under the hands of their father Jeduthun who prophesied with a harp to give thanks and to praise the Lord."

N. Thus then, "prophesy," as a matter of fact, has different meanings?

E. Certainly; and these sons and daughters, &c., &c., on the day of Pentecost—were brought under the power of the Holy Spirit, renewed, enlightened and, endowed with extraordinary gifts; but the particular effect of the change, was, faith in the Lord Jesus Christ—by which, they became active and useful in His service wherever placed—even as did the prophets and people of God of old—only, with a more enlarged knowledge of divine and spiritual things: Hear Calvin on this point: "Under the kingdom of Christ there shall not be a few prophets only, unto whom God may reveal his secrets; but all men shall be endued with spiritual wisdom, even to the prophetic excellency." As it is also in Jeremiah xxxi., 34. "Every man shall no longer

But the voices in the house teach his neighbour," for all men shall know Me from the least to the greatest.—Heb. viii., 11.

N. But the daughters of Philip did prophesy.—Acts xxi., 9.

E. Here again Calvin may aid in our inquiries. After eulogizing Philip upon being blessed with four daughters, so endowed, he shows, that although prophecies had ceased for years, the Lord had again raised up men and women to foretell things to come, in order to prepare them to hear the Gospel, and then adds:—"But that one cause ought to be sufficient, in that God, by taking away prophecies, did testify that the end and perfection was present in Christ; and it is uncertain how these maidens did execute the office of prophesying, saving that the spirit of God did so guide and govern them, that he did not overthrow the order which he himself set down. And forasmuch as he doth not suffer woman to bear any public office in the Church, it is to be thought that they did prophesy at home, or in some private place without the common assembly." (So also Hodge.) That this interpretation is correct may be inferred from the prudent manner in which Aquila and Priscilla expounded the Gospel to Apollos.—"They took him unto them, to their own house," privately.—Acts xviii., 26.

N. But we have over-looked Miriam the prophetess—was she not a leader, with Moses and Aaron, in bringing Israel out of Egypt?

E. Moses and Aaron were the only leaders in that great deliverance, Ex. vi., vii., 1'sa. lxxvii., 26, No female is mentioned in the repeated command, "Go unto Pharaoh," or in connection with the signs and wonders in Egypt and the Red Sea. Miriam led the women and united her song of triumph with that of Moses and Aaron. She indeed claimed equality with Moses; but for her presumption became a leper.—Num. xii. In Micah vi., 3, 4, the prophet is reproving Israel for forgetting the goodness of God—and asks, "O my people what have I done unto thee,"—"I have brought thee up out of Egypt."—"I sent before thee Moses, Aaron, and Miriam." Upon which Calvin remarks—"Moses was a minister of their deliverance in upholding civil order, and Aaron as to the priesthood and spiritual discipline. With regard to Miriam, she performed her part toward the women:—she composed a song of thanksgiving after passing through

the Red Sea and hence arose her base envy with regard to Moses ; for, being highly-praised, she thought herself equal to him in dignity. It is at the same time right to mention, that it was an extraordinary thing, when God gave authority to a woman, as was the case with Deborah, that no one may consider this singular precedent as a common rule."

N. I now understand the position held by Miriam on the occasion—a leader of the choir. But women prayed and prophesied in the Church of Corinth.

E. True—a modern divine may enlighten us somewhat respecting matters in that Church. "The context (1 Cor. xi., 3, 16) shows that the kind of meeting where silence was enjoined, was a social prayer, and conference meeting rather than a formal Sabbath-day's service, such as we have now,"—"Corinth was a heathen city, with the new religion recently introduced, and where of necessity believers would gather in little groups, and often, if not always, as yet, in private houses, and where, without a pastor to direct the services, each one, according to his own prompting, would take part. And so full were they of new-born zeal, and so joyous in their new-found hope, that evidently but little order was observed in their meetings ; several speaking at a time, some in unknown tongues, and some under the prophetic inspiration ; and even the women, had become so enthusiastic that they threw aside the veil, the usual style of head-dress then and there for modest women." Inspiration sharply reproves this gross impropriety, appealing to their taste as well as to the law of man's headship. In the subsequent part of the discussion now under consideration, (1 Cor. xiv., 34, 35,) Paul forbids altogether their participation in the official service of the Church. The entire context shows that the command of silence applies, not specifically to preaching—as the general includes the specific this is implied—but to the social and less formal services."—*Rev. Dr. Stevenson, Princeton Review, January 1873.*

N. Let us read 1 Cor. xiv., 34 : "Let your women keep silence in the Churches ; for it is not permitted unto them to speak ; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law. And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home ; for it is a shame for a woman to speak in the Church."—This is plain and express

language—"Keep silence"—"Not permitted to speak"—"Learn at home"—"A shame for a woman to speak."

E. Yes, and all these phrases are employed to deter women from speaking in the Church. How important must the subject be! Say to a christian lady, you, by your conduct, have exposed yourself to shame.—How humiliating!—Yet, it is the Holy Spirit who applies this language to a woman when she speaks in Church.

N. The injunction in these verses is very clear and minute. Is not the word "speak" used in different ways?

E. Yes in the original it is generic and comprehends all forms of address, "to utter," "to tell," "to talk," "to say," "to speak," "to use" the voice without any reference to the words spoken, so that every conceivable form of speech allowable in religious meetings to man is forbidden to woman, in the use of this word.

N. It is pleasant and profitable to learn, and understand the truths of scripture. Is not the same doctrine set forth in 1 Tim., chap. ii.

E. Certainly—the apostle is referring to public worship, wheresoever conducted. v. 1, "I exhort—therefore that—" "Supplications, prayers be made"—for all men, &c., &c.,—in v. 8, adds, "I will therefore that men (literally the man) pray everywhere." In v. 9, 10, he directs as to the dress and deportment of women, at such times. Verse 12, "Let the women learn in silence," i.e., listen attentively to what is said, and with all subjection to the servant of the Lord. Again v. 12, "I suffer not."—I do not allow women to usurp authority, over the man, by preaching or praying. This applies to the whole race of man as well as to a husband. The reasons are then given, v. 13, 14, "Adam was first formed." "Adam was not deceived but the woman."—The command is imperative, the reasons valid—such as satisfied the inspired penman.

N. But when were the epistles to Timothy written?

E. The First, A.D., 65 (also that to Titus), the Second, A.D., 66. These epistles contain the last attestations, of inspiration, as to the position of women in the Church, then, and in all time to come. Mark: had there been any previous law (which there was not) authorising women to speak in religious assemblies it would have been superseded by those declarations to the Corinthians and to Timothy.

N. This is convincing and most satisfactory evidence that women ought not to speak in the house of God. But what are we to say of those who allow and urge women to speak in Church?

E. Well, it is evident that those who insist upon women speaking in Church, come into conflict, not merely with man, but also with the Lord Jesus Christ.—Women may and ought to worship together as in the meeting where Lydia was so signally blessed.—Acts xvi., 14. The office of the Ministry is by the appointment of God; No man has a right to exercise it unless called by God—(Heb. v., 4, Rom. i., 1, 1 Tim. i., 12,) therefore women, having no authority from God, cannot be Ministers in His Church.

Men, not women, are overseers, (Elders, Presbyters) in the Church and as such necessary for its prosperity.

The high honor conferred upon woman (for be it remembered, that the influence possessed by woman either for good or evil is unbounded,) in her personal, domestic and relative duties is, in scripture placed in contrast to the silence enjoined upon her in the church. These duties are onerous and multifarious.—(1 Tim. ii., 15,5,14; Titus ii., 3,5.)

The man is the head of the woman, not in a temporary or local capacity, but always and universally; therefore, while it is so, the command remains in force that woman must be silent in the Church.

When God expressly calls a woman to any sphere—whether to be a warrior, or a ruler, or a prophetess, she ought certainly to respond to His call. Her position is then beyond our judgment. God who establishes rules has a right to make exceptions to his rules; but is it for us to usurp the authority of God?

N. Being now in your Library would you kindly see what has been said by the eminent men of the past on this subject? You have quoted Calvin and Hodge; can you favour me with more?

E. With great pleasure: Tertullian says: "A woman is not permitted to speak in the Church, nor yet to teach, or baptize, or offer, that she may not claim to herself any office of the man, not to say of the priest." The great Augustine quotes these words with approval.

Let us next hear Matthew Henry: "Shame is the mind's uneasy reflection on having done an indecent thing. And

what more indecent than for a woman to quit her rank, renounce the subordination of her sex, or do what in common account had such aspect and appearance." "The natural distinction God has made we should observe." The woman was made subject to the man, and she should keep her station and be content with it. For this reason women must be silent in the Churches, not set up for teachers; for this is setting up for superiority over the man."

Here is Scott: "The women required to "be silent," with all subjection, in the religious assemblies; for the apostle, as Christ's representative and declaring his will, would not suffer women to teach." "Moreover, the man was not 'deceived' in the first instance; but the tempter prevailed against the woman, who was the first 'in the transgression' and the seducer of the man. This humbling consideration was suited to convince women, that they ought not to affect authority, or presume to be public teachers."

Next let us look into Albert Barnes: "It is a shame."—"It is disreputable and shameful; it is a breach of propriety. Their station in life demands modesty, humility, and they should be free from the ostentation of appearing so much in public as to take part in the public services of teaching and praying, it does not become their rank in life; it is not fulfilling the object which God evidently intended them to fill. He has appointed men to rule; to hold office, to instruct and govern the Church; and it is improper that women should assume that office upon themselves." "But this cannot be interpreted as meaning that it is improper for females to speak or to pray in meetings of their own sex, assembled for prayer or for benevolence; nor that it is improper for a female to speak or pray in a Sabbath School. Neither of these come under the apostle's idea of a Church. And in such meetings no rule of propriety or of the scriptures is violated in their speaking for the edification of each other, or in leading in social prayer."

Rosenmuller says: "Women were not to teach the people, nor were they to interrupt those who were speaking."

Gebert, in his Mission of Women, says: "The Mission of woman in general, is less to explain the truth than to make it felt." "In order that the truth may gain an ascendancy over us, it is necessary that it be first revealed to our understanding: This is the Ministry of Man, because in him

the reasoning faculty predominates." The Ministry of Man in teaching the truth is a public Ministry, which addresses itself to masses ; consequently the pulpit, the public preaching of the gospel, and the magistrature of the doctrine is confided to him. In woman the power of the affections or sentiment predominates. This predominance of sentiment determines the peculiar Mission of Woman ; its object is to effect the entrance of the truth into the heart, to convert it by love. This sentiment is not taught, it is insinuated."

I might add pages and pages to the same effect from the most eminent divines of all ages.

N. Thank you most sincerely. Home is woman's sphere as a wife, a mother, a daughter, and that sphere affords ample scope for the best and noblest gifts and virtues. What is more beautiful on earth than the godly woman doing her gracious ministry to her own household and to the needy around her,—helping joyfully in every good work, adorning the gospel of Christ by meek subjection to rightful authority,—training children for the Lord,—requiting her parents,—loving and serving her husband,—ruling well her servants,—showing hospitality, and in all things bringing Heaven into the House. How much sweeter, better, nobler this "sphere" even if the Lord had not forbidden the other sphere ! But, as you have abundantly shewn, the **LORD HATH SPOKEN** and it is ours to obey His voice.

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